

Readers' forum

Compensation for Japanese-Americans?

To the editor: 10-15-86

It was reassuring to hear from Mitsugi Kasai that Tom Shimizu is opposed to compensation for those Japanese and Japanese-Americans involved in relocation during World War II. The idea of paying up to \$2 billion, most of it to former enemy aliens and those who refused to affirm their loyalty to the United States during time of war, appears an outrage to many who are familiar with the circumstances in question.

Less reassuring is Kasai's recounting of Peter Iron's work and the resulting cases that were retried after some 40 years. To claim that Iron is an unbiased observer is ludicrous. To state that he uncovered a "scandalous government campaign of 'suppression, alteration and destruction of crucial evidence that could have persuaded the Supreme Court to strike down the massive internment'" is the height of presumption.

The terms "internment" and "concentration camps" which supporters of redress so like to use were specifically rejected by the Supreme Court,

which viewed relocation for exactly what it was: exclusion from a portion of the country. Internment could properly be applied to the several thousand Japanese who were deemed to be a threat to the security of the U.S. and were, indeed, interned for the duration of the war, but not in relocation centers.

Suppression and alteration of facts can easily be attributed to those supporting apology and payment. For example, there are those, like Mitsugi Kasai, who have attempted to equate relocation with Nazi concentration camps. In none of the many magazine, TV or newspaper reports of the last few years has the government side of the issue been clearly or fairly stated. The oft-repeated contention that there is no evidence of disloyalty by a single Japanese-American is the sort of untrue and deceptive statement used by those seeking money.

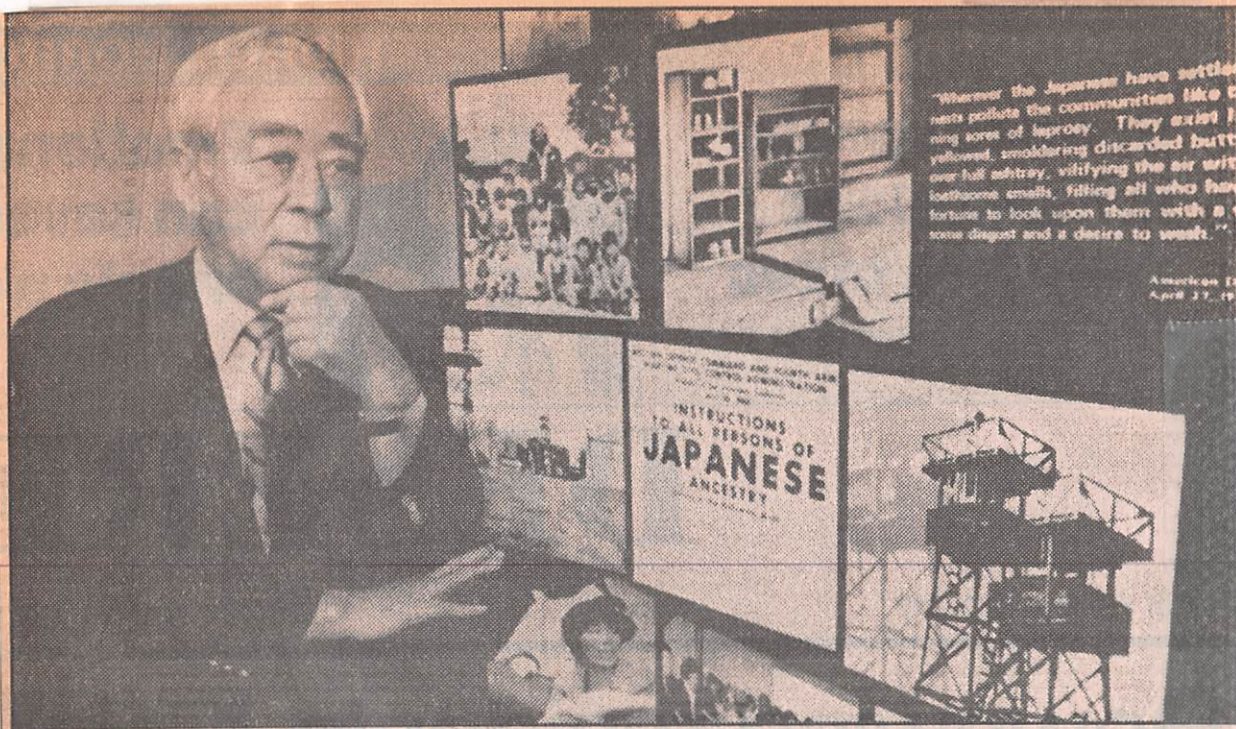
Kasai says, "It was unfortunate that the government used the results of the loyalty/leave registration program as a means to judge the loyalty of the internees." The whole issue of reloca-

tion centered around how to recognize the loyal Japanese and Japanese-Americans from those who were disloyal or loyal to the Empire of Japan. The U.S., in its clumsy way, thought it might be a good first step to ask each person to renounce allegiance to the Emperor and affirm willingness to serve in the U.S. forces. "No-no" boys were those who refused to do either and they numbered a full 25 percent of those eligible for service.

Kasai is "quick to admit" that there were "some enthusiastic and fanatical" supporters of Japan. There weren't some, there were thousands. About 6,000 were repatriated to Japan after the war.

All of this is not to say that the vast majority of Japanese-Americans were loyal and exemplary citizens; that many served the country with distinction and that as a group they have contributed greatly to the nation. What it does say is that historical revisionism, in the name of justice for the purpose of obtaining money and position, is not an admirable endeavor.

Greg W. Beesley
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AP photo

George Kondo, one of 120,000 Japanese-Americans interned in World War II, looks at display.

Top court deciding what to do about a 45-year-old injustice

WASHINGTON (UPI) — Japanese Americans interned during World War II deserve "their day in court," their lawyer told the Supreme Court, but the government insists it is too late to seek damages for what happened 45 years ago.

The arguments came Monday in the administration's appeal of a lower court ruling enabling about 60,000 internment camp survivors to file for billions of dollars in damages for violation of their constitutional rights.

"The wartime imprisonment of plaintiffs imposed substantial damages on them," said Benjamin Zelenko, representing the National Council for Japanese American Redress. "They seek their day in court."

Solicitor General Charles Fried, arguing for the government, agreed the internment of U.S. citizens of Japanese origin was a scar on U.S. history.

"This case arises out of a deplorable episode," he said. "The Japanese internment was surely our greatest departure from the values for which we were fighting."

However, Fried said, there was no legal basis for a lower court's decision to reinstate a class-action lawsuit by 19 Japanese Americans seeking damages stemming from the mass roundup after the Dec. 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese Imperial Navy.

President Franklin Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 on Feb.

19, 1942, less than 10 weeks after Japanese forces destroyed the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor.

The order required the relocation of Japanese Americans living on the West Coast into camps in Arkansas, Utah and other states where up to 120,000 detainees lived for up to three years surrounded by barbed wire and military police.

Families were allowed to take only what they could carry. By the time the executive order was lifted in December 1944, they had lost homes, farms and businesses.

Zelenko said the survivors, many of whom were at the court for Monday's arguments, deserve a chance to go to trial to prove the internment was the result of racial prejudice and to collect damages for billions of dol-

lars in lost property.

A judge ruled in 1984 the suit was barred by a six-year statute of limitations.

However, the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia said the clock for filing claims did not begin ticking until 1980 when a congressional report concluded the internment was based "on their ethnic origins alone," rather than military necessity.

Fried argued the very latest date at which the statute of limitations could begin was 1976, when President Gerald Ford declared the removal of Japanese Americans from the West Coast a "national mistake" and revoked Roosevelt's executive order.

A ruling is expected by early July.